

Guevara Believed Killed

—Proof Awaited Here

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Ernesto "Che" Guevara apparently has been killed by the Bolivian Army.

The death of Fidel Castro's longtime guerrilla leader was reported to officials in La Paz late yesterday by Col. Joaquin Zenteno Anaya, commander of the Bolivian Army's 8th Division.

Zenteno said the body of one of seven guerrillas shot and killed in a battle Sunday has been identified as that of Guevara.

The army chief of staff, Col. Marcos Vasquez Sempertegui, said, "Official reports from Vallegrande affirm Guevara was killed and that his body is now with the Bolivian army." But he said this was not conclusive proof.

The battle was in mountainous country near Higuera, about 300 miles southeast of La Paz. The guerrillas' bodies were taken to Vallegrande.

Gen. Alfredo Ovando Candia, chief of the Bolivian armed forces, left the Bolivian capital last night for Vallegrande to check the report. The Army invited reporters to fly to Vallegrande today, presumably to view the body. The town is in rough terrain about 400 miles from La Paz.

U.S. Cautious

Officials here said they were awaiting positive identification—comparing fingerprints with the known prints of Guevara.

There have been a number of recent reports that Guevara was dead, but U.S. officials put a lot more stock in yesterday's. Part of their reasoning's that the Bolivians have learned a lot about the guerrilla force, and the Bolivia would suffer a major propaganda setback if the death report is later proved false.

Guevara, a 39-year-old Argentine, disappeared under mysterious circumstances about two years ago. If it is true that he has been leading Communist guerrillas and now has been killed, it could be a major blow to Castro-style guerrillas throughout Latin America.

Bolivia now possesses an excellent set of Guevara's fingerprints from Argentine sources, plus a less perfect set of prints obtained in Mexico. These prints will be used to determine if the body presumed to be that of Guevara is actually his.

There are persons in Bolivia today who are expert enough in fingerprint comparison to establish or rule out whether the dead man is Guevara, officials here say. It was not immediately known whether the body would be flown to La Paz from the battle area or whether the definitive identification would be made in the field.

The Battle

The guerrilla casualties occurred during a four-hour fire fight with Bolivian soldiers Sunday about four miles northwest of Higuera, in the general area

of Camiri, where the insurgents first opened their drive against the government of President Rene Barrientos last spring.

The guerrillas fought desperately against the Bolivian patrol. Four soldiers were killed, five wounded.

Of the seven guerrillas killed in the fight, two were positively identified as Cubans. One Bolivian military source said Guevara was mortally wounded in the battle and talked with his captors before he died.

First word that Guevara may have met a violent end began to seep out of the Bolivian capital yesterday morning when President Barrientos held a background meeting with newsmen. At this session, Barrientos revealed first details of the encounter and mentioned the possibility that Guevara might have been captured or slain.

Later in the day, Gen. Ovando strengthened the report, telling reporters, "the Reds lost five men among whom, presumably, is Ernesto Che Guevara ... I hope to God it's true."

2nd Force in Area

Before leaving La Paz for the scene last night, Ovando said the Army is on the track of a second guerrilla group which tried to be a decoy government troops away from the unit presumably led by Guevara. It was Ovando who announced on Sept. 24 that the 4th and 8th Army Divisions were closing in on the guerrilla group led by Commandante Ramon, the pseudonym Guevara was reported using in Bolivia.

Bolivian Foreign Minister Walter Guevara Arze, at a meeting of the Organization of American States here last month, released a group of photographs, documents and

fingerprints which he said had been found in caves used by the guerrillas near Camiri.

Guevara's fingerprints were found on two fake Uruguayan passports and on battle-orders in his known handwriting, the Bolivians said. The photos showed a man with a shaved head and without Guevara's beard and mustache. Comparison with known pictures of Guevara appeared to constitute compelling evidence that "Che" had been or was still in Bolivia.

Informed sources said they believed Guevara had entered Bolivia with the forged passports by way of Spain and Sao Paulo, Brazil. There was some skepticism here about the authenticity of the evidence. The skeptics said the photos and fingerprints could have been "planted" in the Bolivian caves. But there was no question that the fingerprints were genuine, planted or not.

It was generally believed that Guevara was dead, perhaps as a result of a dispute with Castro, when he first vanished in Havana in mid-1965. Subsequently, he was reported in a score of countries but no non-Communist nation had any certain knowledge of his whereabouts.